

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, November 8, 2013

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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. NAEP Results: Rhode Island surpasses national average in mathematics, reading

Yesterday (November 7) marked a big day for Rhode Island, as the U.S. Department of Education released the results of the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as The Nation's Report Card. The reports show that, for the first time in the long history of this national assessment, Rhode Island students scored above the national average on all four components: mathematics and reading in grade 4 and grade 8.

Particularly impressive was the performance of our 8th-graders, who were significantly behind the nation as a whole four years ago. Over the past four years, our 8th-graders have improved by 8 percentage points (based on percent of students scoring proficient or better), far outpacing the national growth and moving above the national average.

We still have work ahead of us, of course, particularly when it comes to closing achievement gaps. The performance of several student groups – notably black students, Hispanic students, and economically disadvantaged students – has improved, but achievement gaps still remain. The gaps are particularly large in relation to English learners and students with disabilities.

On the whole, however, these results show that our strategic plan for transforming education in Rhode Island is really taking hold – and is leading to some positive results. Congratulations to all Rhode Island students and educators – and let's keep working together to make our schools America's best!

2. Rhode Island LEAs invited to participate in international high-school assessment modeled on PISA

As we continue our commitment to accelerating all schools toward greatness, one question that often comes up is: How does student achievement in Rhode Island compare with student achievement across the country – and around the world? Assessments such as the NAEP (see above) help us compare our state results on national and international scales. As I shared with the RISSA Board when we met this week, a new assessment from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), called the OECD Test for Schools, will be the first assessment to measure the performance of individual high schools in the United States against the performance levels of other countries. The OECD administers the well-known *Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, and it has modeled the OECD Test for Schools on the PISA.

Last year, five Rhode Island districts volunteered to participate in the pilot version of the OECD Test for Schools, and they found the experience to be beneficial and informative. Later this school year, high-school students across the country will take the OECD Test for Schools, and the sponsoring organization in the United States, America Achieves, is encouraging Rhode Island LEAs to participate.

When I spoke about this opportunity at the RISSA Board meeting, some of you expressed concern about the cost of participating in this project. I received some great news yesterday, however: America Achieves has indicated that they can pay the expenses for the participation of at least 10 Rhode Island high schools – so cost should not be a barrier to participation.

I strongly encourage you to consider participating in this project. Please let me know *as soon as possible* if you are interested so that we can begin the sign-up process. Please contact my

assistant, Dana Wilson (dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov) by Friday, **November 22**, to let her know of your interest.

To provide you with more information about the OECD Test for Schools, we have scheduled a webinar with America Achieves, for Tuesday, **November 26**, at 4 p.m. The deadline to sign up for participation is the end of the year, so I want to get you all the information you will need to decide on participation as soon as possible.

For more information from America Achieves, see:

<http://www.americaachieves.org/oecd>.

3. Mathematics teacher receives 2013 Milken Educator Award

This morning (November 8), Governor Chafee, Board Chair Mancuso, and I visited the Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy Middle School, in Lincoln, for an exciting announcement: the Milken Family Foundation has chosen Marielle Emet, a 5th-grade mathematics teacher and an academic dean at the school, as the Rhode Island 2013 Milken Educator Award winner. Marielle was thrilled to receive this surprise award, which brings with it a \$25,000 honorarium. As many of us noted at this event, Blackstone Valley Prep is a leading school that has reached high levels of proficiency while diminishing achievement gaps. The Blackstone Valley Prep 7th-grade students last year scored 86 percent proficient in reading and a remarkable 93 percent proficient in mathematics – both well above the state average! Marielle has played a key role in the success of her school, but she attributes much of the success to the teamwork

among the teachers, students, and family members in the Blackstone Valley Prep community. I look forward to working with Marielle and other great Rhode Island teachers this year on such important topics as educator autonomy, innovation powered by technology, and best practices in teaching and learning.

4. Providence Plan selected as potential winner of federal grant for innovation

Congratulations to The Providence Plan, which the U.S. Department of Education has selected as one of 25 potential grantees in the 4th round of the Investing in Innovation (i3) competition. The U.S. Department of Education received 61 applications for this round of funding. The potential grantees must receive matching funds in order to receive the federal funding. “In this era of rapid change, we must make sure that our students are keeping pace with the rigor, relevance, and changing demands of the global job market,” U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said about this round of i3 grants. “I am encouraged by the innovative ideas to accelerate student achievement demonstrated in these applications.” I hope that The Providence Plan will receive matching funds and will move forward with its plan to bring new and innovative ideas about education to the forefront in Rhode Island.

From RIDE

Health and safety:

5. RIDE seeks examples of best practices in Social and Emotional Learning

RIDE continues to advance the efforts of under way to address the social and emotional learning needs of students, as aligned to the Basic Education Program. Research shows that social-emotional competence is a key in being prepared for college and careers and has positive effects on academic performance. These areas of competency include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (www.CASEL.org)

RIDE is looking for evidence-based or promising practices related to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) that are taking place with our students or in our schools. If you, or others you know, would like to share information about effective SEL-related activities, please download the [Promising SEL Practices in Rhode Island form](#), fill it out, and e-mail it to [Alice Woods](#) or [Sue Constable](#).

Assessments:

6. PARCC releases more sample items

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) released new sample test items on Wednesday. With this release, PARCC has now made public exemplar test items across the grades in both mathematics and English language arts/literacy. These sample items are designed to help teachers, students, and parents get a better sense of how PARCC will measure student learning in mathematics and ELA/literacy. The PARCC assessments are aligned to the Common Core State

Standards. Schools are scheduled to field-test the assessments this spring and to roll them out formally in the next (2014-15) school year. The sample items have gone through a rigorous review process to ensure that they are of high quality and that they reflect the range of items that will be on the operational tests.

PARCC will make all of its sample items available later this year on the PARCC technology platform, providing an opportunity for students and teachers to try out the assessment system in the manner in which it will be administered.

The new sample items are available at:

www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes

Evaluations:

7. Additional evaluation-calibration sessions scheduled; LEAs expected to sign up for at least two

Building on the successful Student Learning Objective (SLO) Approval Calibration sessions, RIDE is offering three additional in-district calibration opportunities throughout the year. The first round of calibration sessions, offered January 6 to February 4, will focus on reviewing teacher practice; the second, offered March 3 to 28, will focus on providing specific and actionable feedback; and the third, offered April 14 to May 16, will focus on scoring SLOs. LEAs are expected to sign up for at least two calibration sessions, and leaders should consider the areas their staff most need to calibrate; if necessary, LEAs can sign up for all three remaining calibration sessions. Please note that the in-district

calibration sessions replace the traditional evaluator trainings that RIDE has led during the last two years.

To coordinate sessions and to discuss logistics or ways to tailor sessions to your needs, please e-mail Greg Stewart, at greg.stewart@ride.ri.gov , or call him, at 222-8082. Additional information, including descriptions of the calibration sessions, is available on the RIDE website, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval-InPersonTraining>.

Conferences:

8. Conference on secondary schools scheduled for March, registration opens next month

The New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC), of which RIDE is a member, is hosting its fifth annual conference, High School Redesign in Action, for educators across the country to share success stories, exchange best practices, and continue to build momentum for innovations that will prepare all students for success in college, careers, and communities of the 21st century. The conference will be held on Thursday and Friday, March 20-21, 2014. Online registration will open December 1. For more information, see:

<http://newenglandssc.org/conference>

From the U.S. Department of Education

9. U.S. Department of Education notes days of recognition

Please see these notices from the U.S. Department of Education:

[Veterans Day](#) (**Monday**, November 11) celebrates the service of all U.S. military veterans. Schools are encouraged to invite veterans into their classrooms. Veterans can share their experiences and teach students lessons about the history and significance of Veterans Day, helping students reflect upon the importance of the ideals of liberty, freedom, and democracy. (Note: A [teacher resource guide](#) is available online.)

[American Education Week](#) (November 18-22) celebrates teachers and school staff. The week's tagline, "Great Public Schools: A Basic Right and Our Responsibility," is a call for all Americans to do their part in making public schools great for every child. During the week, education support professionals will be honored on Wednesday, November 20, and substitute educators will be honored on Friday, November 22.

From other organizations

10. Data Quality Campaign seeks nominees for awards

Please see this notice from the Data Quality Campaign:

The Data Quality Campaign seeks applications for four categories of awards to recognize the work of leaders to advance the safe and effective use of education data. These leaders have demonstrated a focus on using education data

at all levels to support families and educators in their efforts to improve student achievement.

The categories are:

- The *State Policymaker Award* recognizes a state policymaker, such as a governor or state legislator, and the vision they have created promoting a culture of data use within education through the implementation of a policy or program, engagement with stakeholders, and securing external support.
- The *State Data Leader Award* celebrates leadership on the part of a state data leader for the creation of an effective state data system that serves districts with role based portals that allows educators to safely access and use education data.
- The *Advocacy Award* recognizes outstanding work by a national or state-based nonprofit organization in promoting safe and effective data use in education by engaging with stakeholders, and building a broad base of support for data initiatives, programs, and policies.
- The *District Data Use Award* recognizes outstanding work by school district administrator or a board member that have improved district outcomes by using data to make better decisions, engage with stakeholders such as parents and community-based organizations, and increase academic success for all students.

Applications for the 2014 awards close on **December 5**. The winners will be announced in early 2014.

To read the detailed criteria for each award and submit an

application, please visit the Data Quality Campaign website, at:

<http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/success-stories/recognition-program>

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx>